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SALINE VALLEY AREA, INYO COUNTY

The Saline Valley area in east-central Inyo County, has long been of interest to the mining industry; recently this interest has been heightened by the application by the Navy Department for the withdrawal of a large tract of land in that part of the county. The area subject to withdrawal for the Navy's projected air-to-air gunnery range contains nearly 920,000 acres of land, which, if withdrawn, would block the important access roads to adjacent parts of the County. Refer to the sketch map, fig. 1.

Within the past several years the Division of Mines has published several reports pertaining to the geology and mineral deposits of that part of Inyo County. These reports are listed in Table 1. Known mineral deposits within the proposed withdrawal are listed in Table 2.

The more recent report, which describes most of the known mineral deposits that would be affected by the withdrawal, is Special Report 42, Geology of the mineral deposits in the Ubehebe Peak quadrangle, Inyo County, California. This report was prepared by a geologist of the U.S. Geological Survey after an intensive study of the stratigraphic sequence and structure of the rocks of the area and of the geology of its mineral resources. Similar studies are underway on two quadrangles to the south, the Darwin and Panamint Butte quadrangles, each of which extends into the southern part of the proposed withdrawal. Much of the information in the following paragraphs has been abstracted from Special Report 42.

Mining in the area was begun at least as early as 1875 when the Ubehebe Mining District was formed, and has been carried on intermittently to the present time. Several mines have a history of many years of mineral production. The Ubehebe Mine was first productive in 1908 and has yielded ore as recently as 1953; the Lost Burro mine, active as early as 1907, produced gold ore intermittently until 1942 when gold mines were closed by Presidential Executive order; the Lippincott mine which has been the most continuously active mine since 1942, was first worked in the early 1900's.

Mines in this area have yielded commercial quantities of copper, gold, lead-silver-zinc, tungsten, asbestos (tremolite), and talc. Deposits which may be potentially productive include chrysotile asbestos, nepheline syenite and many metalliferous ore prospects. Mineral deposits for which there are records in the California Division of Mines and in various published sources, are listed in Table 2 by commodity.

The deposits of lead-silver-zinc ores probably have been the most exploited of any deposits in this area. The Ubehebe and Lippincott have been the chief producers. The Ubehebe mine, the most productive but presently inactive, had, through 1951, yielded a total of 2,940 tons of ore containing 2,249,438 pounds of lead, 122,742 pounds of zinc, 26,424 pounds of copper, 34,912 ounces of silver and 40 ounces of gold. Much of the copper output may have been contained in ore produced from the adjoining Copper Belle mine, owned and operated by the same company during its productive history.

In 1954 (to November 1) the Lippincott Mine, according to the owner, yielded 834,000 pounds of ore having an average grade of 30 percent lead. The owner also estimated the mine's total yield as on the order of 5,000,000 pounds of ore of that grade, or about one and one-half million pounds of lead. The mine has been active since 1940, productive since 1942, and presently supplies about one-third of the lead requirements for the owner's battery manufacturing concern at Santa Ana. The ore is smelted at the owner's smelters at Bonnie Claire, Nevada and Ontario, California.

The Lee Flat Mine, in the southern part of the proposed withdrawal, has not been as extensively exploited as the two above, but is notable for the high silver content of its ore. This mine has been active in recent years.

Copper deposits probably received the earliest attention in this area, as the Ulida Mine was discovered sometime before 1875, a discovery that led to the formation of the Ubehebe Mining District. The total recorded production from those copper properties that lie within the Ubehebe Peak quadrangle (see Inyo County map) is at least 120,000